



Yellowstone River *Conservation District* Council

Meeting Minutes – January 22, 2009 Billings Hotel and Convention Center

Members Present: Will Alexander, Carbon – Walter Rolf, Custer – Dave Schwarz, Prairie – Tony Barone, Richland – Don Youngbauer Rosebud/MACD – Steve Story, Stillwater, Paul Gilbert, Sweet Grass – Phil Fox, Treasure – Bob Hector, Yellowstone – Orvin Finsaas, McKenzie County, North Dakota – John Moorhouse, RAC Chair.

Others Present: Warren Kellogg, TAC; Kit Sutherland, NRCS; Jim Lovell, Confluence Consulting; Arthur Gehmert, RAC; Laurie Zeller, DNRC; Richard Cayko, RAC; Mack Cole, RAC; Jerry Hanson, RAC; Greg Johnson, ACOE; Robert Lubbers, RAC; Boris Krizek, RAC; Mike Penfold, YR Forum; Chuck Tooley, private citizen; Nicole McClain, YRCDC Coordinator; Kelly Norwood, Project Assistant and Carol Watts, Custer CD.

Chairman Don Youngbauer called the meeting to order at 10:10 am on January 22, 2009 . Introductions were made.

Conservation District Updates: Each conservation district present gave an update of recent activities in their areas. Paul Gilbert noted that Gay Easton's presence at the Council meetings was sorely missed. Gay passed away in December 2008. Bob Hector noted that the Yellowstone CD is planning a memorial for Gay.

Coordinator's report: Each Council member had a copy of the coordinators report in the form of a letter. Nicole McClain said that she had gotten comments back on the 2008 annual report. Those comments will be incorporated into the report and it will be posted on the website.

The next item discussed was the FY10/11 budget and work plan which had been completed as required by DNRC. Nicole said completing the work plan was a real eye opener for her and she wanted to make it a living, breathing document which would keep her on track through the year. She asked if a committee could be formed to help with assignments, deadlines and planning. Anyone interested should contact Nicole. Laurie Zeller noted that the format could also be used for the annual report.

Nicole proposed obtaining a new website that would be independent of the state of Montana website. This website would be easier to access and navigate. The YRCDC would also be able to have their own email address through the website. The cost would be approximately \$2,000.00. Paul Gilbert made a motion for the YRCD to obtain the web site, pay the fees for five years and hire someone to set it up under the name to be determined as proposed in the bid for the website. John Moorhouse seconded, there was discussion on the name, and the motion carried by voice vote. The first name chosen was Yellowstone River.org. The second name was Yellowstone River Conservation District Council.org. It is possible to acquire both names.

Chairman's Report: Don Youngbauer said he thought it was important to expedite the projects that the YRCDC had in the planning stages. Montana is scheduled to receive 3.1 million dollars in the economic stimulus package, which will be used for conservation practices. Cartersville Dam and Pryor Creek are both excellent candidates for the money. Don asked that position papers to be written for these projects.

Greg Johnson, ACOE commented that the EIS (environmental impact statement) is driven by the public and other agencies. Intake is different because it is an endangered species project. Cartersville and Pryor creek should be much simpler. The only way to expedite the process is to find funding for the cost share.

Don said that he and Nicole testified before the Natural Resources and transportation Appropriations Subcommittee for the RDGP grant application. Don expressed appreciation for the fine job that Nicole had done. Don also suggests that the upper Yellowstone River districts that do not think they have a Russian olive problem should visit an area on the lower river where they have become a problem. It is much easier to contain them before they take over the area.

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Senator Jon Tester's watershed bill is still a great concern and Matt Jennings has been invited to visit with Don about the wording in the bill. Don said the next course of action will be to work with the House of Representatives.

The next topic was the water situation worldwide. Don is concerned about the waste of water through irrigation practices. It is possible that agriculture could be viewed as the people who are keeping other people from having water. The Council needs to take the lead in dealing with water issues.

The Montana Rail Link effort is a tremendous opportunity because we will be able to work on bank stabilization procedures among other things.

There was a draft of the feasibility study on bank stabilization in the Council member packets. This is a creative way to approach riprap on the river. Nicole read the assessment to the Council. She stated that the plan is to take this document and incorporate it into a memo of understanding with MRL. Warren commented that the assessment was good for everyone involved and asked the Council for direction. John Moorhouse made a motion that the TAC should proceed based on the bank stabilization assessment. Paul Gilbert seconded, there was no discussion and the motion carried by voice vote.

Don commented that the Roundtable discussion held on December 5, 2008 was productive in the sense that it made us aware we were not ready to have a symposium.

The last topic Don addressed was the NRCS special initiative for Russian olive and salt cedar. Joe Fidel was a guest at our last meeting and explained the initiative. Don urged all the Council members to get their districts involved. There is an \$800,000 match available to the RDGP grant should that grant be funded at \$177,000.00.

An action that took place after Nicole testified in Helena was that Senator Brendan from Scobey made a motion to move the funding for conservation districts from the RIT fund into the coal tax fund. An OTO (one time only) funding was attached which would mean that in this biennium the district's funding is safe but after two years they would no longer be in the DNRC budget. Nicole said that the districts responded to this by calling Duane Ankney. It is not known what the status is now.

Don Youngbauer thanked Laurie Zeller for getting our projects on the list of things to do with the stimulus money.

TAC update: See attachment one. Warren Kellogg

Mike Penfold spoke about what was being done in other states to control Russian olive and salt cedar. Both Colorado and Kansas have strategic plans that have been signed by the governor. He informed the Council that there are at least 150 organizations that are willing to fund projects for this kind of control.

Mike suggested that the idea for outreach be expanded to develop a simple straight forward strategic plan for the riparian zone on the Yellowstone river for Russian olive and tamarisk (salt cedar). The reason for this is in order to have all the agencies on board relative to the Yellowstone River. It is important to note what the long term impact will be. Nicole commented that the RDGP grant has elements from other states.

A committee was formed to write a plan. John Moorhouse, Warren Kellogg and Mike Penfold will serve on the committee.

Presentation: Danielle Jones was not able to attend the meeting and no presentation was made.

Roundtable discussion: See attachment two. The past, present and future of the Yellowstone River and the Council were discussed facilitated by Kit Sutherland, Bitterroot RC&D/ NRCS. The purpose of the discussion was to determine what the role of the Council should be concerning the WRDA-99 sec 431 and WRDA-07 sec 3110. Each Council member and others present gave their opinion which has been added to the minutes as attachment two. Council

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members were urged to go back to their conservation districts and get their thoughts on the subject.

Business meeting: Carol Watts handed out the financial reports. Because the hard drive had crashed on her computer Carol had little time to complete the reports. The financial statement shows all the transactions in the account since the last meeting. The grant statement presents the status of the current grants. John Moorhouse made a motion to accept the treasurer's report, Orvin Finsaas seconded, and there was no discussion and the motion passed by voice vote.

The December 4, 2008 meeting minutes were approved as written. Paul Gilbert made the motion to accept them, Walter Rolf seconded and the motion carried by voice vote.

Dornix Park Update: Paul Gilbert commented on the role of the YRCDC concerning supporting the Dornix Park project.

Nicole has an updated version of the position paper showing the changes that were made to the first draft. Paul Gilbert made a motion to accept this version of the Dornix Park position paper as written. John Moorhouse seconded, discussion followed, a voice vote was taken and the motion carried.

MRRIC update: Don Youngbauer spoke for Dave Schwarz who attended the last meeting of the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee. He reported that the committee was still working on the operational rules. One of the issues they are dealing with is collecting eggs for caviar from the shovel nose sturgeon because the pallid sturgeon get in the way.

RAC update: The latest version of the salt cedar BMP (best management practice) brochure was on the table. Minor edits will be made. John Moorhouse asked for approval by the Council. Bob Hector made a motion to accept the Salt Cedar BMP, Paul Gilbert seconded and the motion carried by voice vote.

John Moorhouse hopes to form a partnership with the Audubon Education Center as an opportunity for outreach and education. John is willing to meet with representatives of both groups and come up with a plan to make this work. The result would then be brought to a future Council meeting. Robert Lubbers suggested a tour of the area to show the possibilities. The Council was in agreement that the RAC should pursue this partnership.

John Moorhouse asked what was next on the list for best management practices. After some discussion the Council agreed that water savings and water use through irrigation structures would be the most important one to pursue.

Vice-Chairman's report: Bob Hector reported that the wrap up on the clean up survey is not complete. It appears that the districts do want to participate in some form of a clean up project. He noted that the Yellowstone River clean up project from 2007 did receive the regional collaborative award.

Partner Updates: Laurie Zeller reported for the Department of Natural Resources that the deadline for the next round of 223 grant applications is February 6, 2009. The deadline after this round will be May 1, 2009. There is money available for this grant program. Equipment and educational activities qualify.

On the list of projects for the stimulus project are: Russian olive management, Carterville Dam, Intake fish passage, Pryor Creek fish passage, a dumpsite near Laurel which is close to the river, a fish passage in Park County associated with the river, irrigation project, Dornix Park and the fish passage at Huntley.

The mileage rate for travel has been reduced to 55 cents per mile.

Don Youngbauer spoke on behalf of Ray Beck saying that the trip to Washington D.C. this year is critical. It is important to make new contacts because of the new administration. A trip will be planned for late April 2009.

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Public Comment: There was no public comment.

The meeting adjourned at 3:50 pm. The next meeting will be March 19, 2009. The meeting place is not set. Two hours will be scheduled for the TAC report and Danielle Jones will be asked to do her avian presentation.

Walter Rolf requested that the business part of the meeting be first.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Watts, CCCD Administrator

Yellowstone River Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Notes – 1/21/2009 Billings, MT – Billings Convention Center

Cumulative Effects Analysis

Cumulative Effects Analysis:

Greg Johnson reviewed the ACOE revisions to the Water Quantity and Geological Context cumulative effects spreadsheets. Prior to the next TAC meeting, we will be tasked to review the first three columns of each spreadsheet and be prepared for a discussion at the February 24th TAC meeting. Greg will send out an explanation of the spreadsheet columns before the end of January to facilitate that review. Warren Kellogg will work on a preliminary draft of the Water Quality spreadsheet.

Later, when we begin the discussion on riparian, aquatic, and socioeconomic effects (last three columns of each spreadsheet); the following criteria will be considered:

- Is the effect legitimate?
- Is it measurable?
- Does it fall within the content and temporal scope of the cumulative effects study?
- Is the effect significant enough to justify further consideration?

Riparian

Warren Kellogg reported that he has been working with Burt Williams and George Jordan on clarifying the riparian scope of work. We have tentatively agreed on the questions/hypotheses and need to review study methodology over the next couple weeks.

Socioeconomics

Economics

Greg Johnson has not yet looked into contracting options for an economics pilot study with Headwaters Economics in Bozeman. This topic will be tabled until our next TAC meeting.

Miscellaneous

MRNRC Conference and BiOP Forum

Warren sent a request to the conference organizers suggesting a Yellowstone River Panel on Wednesday afternoon (March 25th). Initial feedback from Don Skaar and Mike Gilbert is that this request will be accommodated. Greg Johnson and Don Youngbauer

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have been asked to tag-team the Yellowstone CES Overview presentation that would kick off the panel discussion. Additional presentations associated with the Yellowstone River are being solicited to fill up the afternoon session.

Russian Olive/Salt Cedar

Mike Penfold discussed the idea to develop a strategic plan for the management of Russian olive and Salt Cedar in the Yellowstone River Basin. The plan would follow the template of the 10-year strategic plan developed by Colorado five years ago. The TAC supported the concept and offered assistance if the Council decides to proceed. Mike will be introducing the idea to the RAC and Council tomorrow (Jan. 22nd).

TAC Meeting Schedule

The next TAC meeting will be held February 24th in Billings at the DEQ Conference Room. The next YRCDC meeting is scheduled for March 19th.

Suggested agenda items for the TAC February meeting:

- Hydrology/Hydraulic modeling status
- Economic Pilot Study Proposal
- Geomorphology Scope of Work Summary
- Cumulative Effects
- MRL Bank Stabilization MOU
- Riparian Scope of Work
- MRNRC Conference

Past Role.

- 1st time citizens group tried to get a handle on how to manage the river for health and going forward
- Conservative group has evolved
- Members are dedicated to the Council, and they interact well
- Prime example of how to get a group together on a huge river

Present Representation

- 95% of river privately owned
- A great group, could use more folks
- Local empowerment
- RAC diversity
- Respect among members.
- Stakeholders groups – need to keep engaged
- TAC focuses on the study
- Working together, great partners

Present Resource

- Region is rich in population and resources
- River defends its own boundaries, tribes not so well
- Some CDs have a lot of development on the tribes

Present Role

- Comfortable with YRCDC on the cumulative effects
- Complete the studies
- Planning important – ends in implementation.
- Pride, longevity of all members
- Successful because of our partners
- The Council is functional
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts
- The impossible is possible because we've succeeded

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Future Challenge

- Balance the needs of agriculture with others
- Define sustainable uses of the resource
- Define the Council's role regarding tributaries
- Focus on representation of CDs
- Identify projects and involvement
- Identify RAC's role
- Identify responsible and balanced management of the resource
- Improve education and outreach, public relations
- Improve urban-rural interface
- Increase RAC participation
- Recruitment of new Council members if someone want to step down

Future Representation

- Council is an experienced and knowledgeable liaison
- Council members to act as the go-between CDs
- Council should provide leadership and local representation
- Important to maintain and develop new partnerships
- In support of Council going forward
- Representation on the entire river is important

Future Role

- 310-program facilitation
- Build and maintain strong relationships with other organizations including environmental groups
- Evaluate, inform, and implement.
- Expand engagement to include work on tribs
- Identify and support projects under WRDA 3110
- Importance of RAC Chair seat on Council
- Outreach & education
- RAC development of voluntary BMPs
- Review projects, records, recommendations, BMP review, and applied science center for all districts.
- TAC involvement with project review and recommendations for implementation
- YRCDC understands the river, can review and make recommendations.